

# Erik Christian Sørensen's own house

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## **ABOUT ERIK CHRISTIAN SØRENSEN**

Erik Christian Sørensen was born in 1922 and died in 2011. He graduated from high school at 20 years old and in the same year started at the Royal Danish Academy School of Architecture, from which he graduated in 1947. He travelled to Stockholm during his studies to work for the architect Sven Markelius.

Two years after graduating from the Academy, he returned to work as a teacher, and from 1961 to 1992 he was a resident professor of architecture. From 1952, he ran his own drawing office beside his position at the Academy.

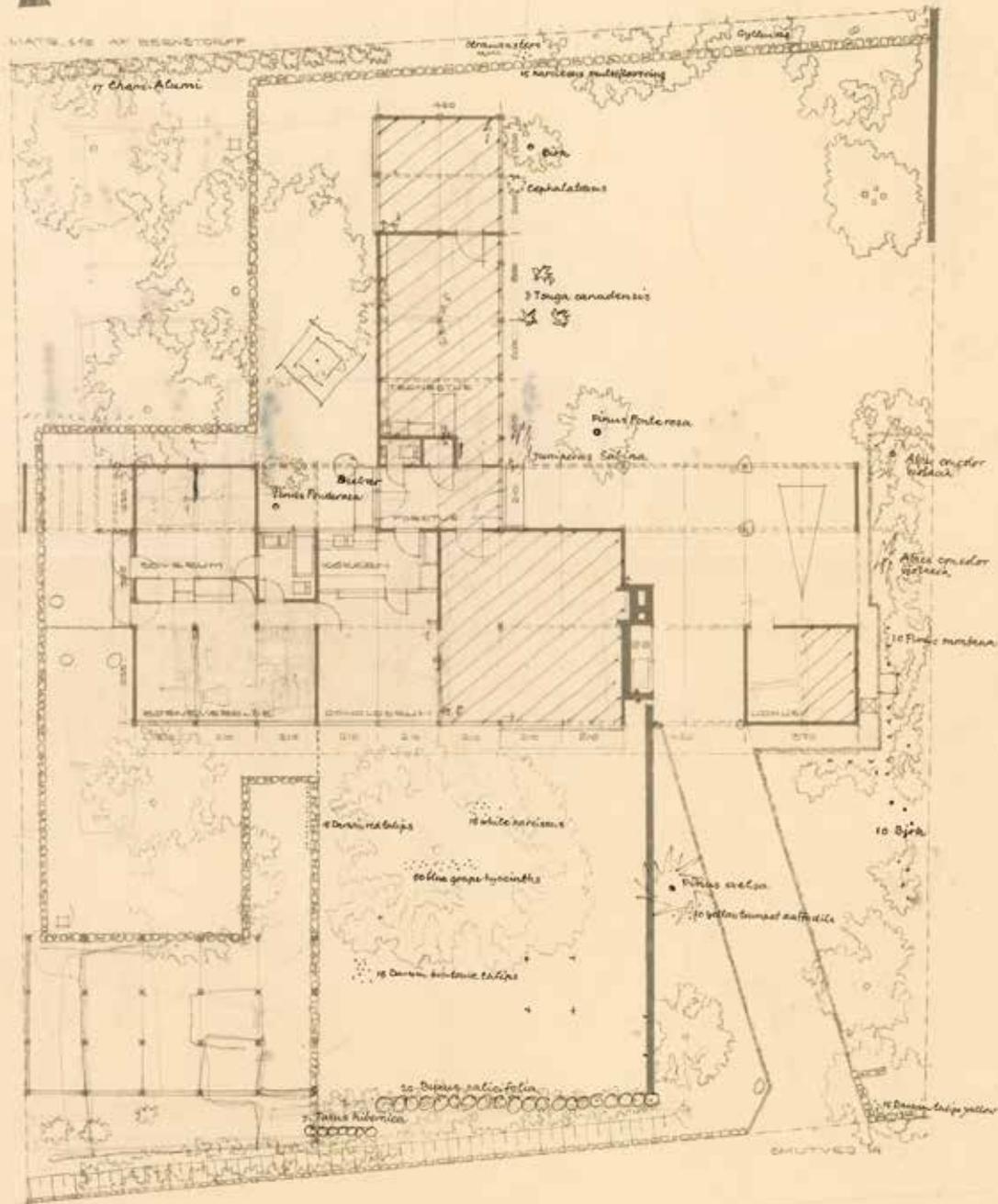
Erik Christian Sørensen received the Eckersberg Medal in 1957, Træprisen in 1969, the C.F. Hansen Medal in 1989 and the Nykredit Architecture Prize in 1991. One of his buildings was honoured in the UK in 1993 as the Building of the Year, and in 2007 he received the award of merit from Dreyers Fond.

### **About Erik Christian Sørensen:**

- Virum pharmacy, together with the architect Mogens Boertmann, 1952.
- Hotel Østerport, Copenhagen, 1956.
- Holiday home for film director and scriptwriter Hagen Hasselbalch and his wife Tata, Porto Pederó, Mallorca, 1966.
- EDB og Revisionscentral for Danske Bank, Copenhagen, 1964 and 1968.
- Viking Ship Hall, Roskilde, 1967.
- Crystallographic Data Centre, Cambridge University, England, together with his wife, the architect Cornelia Zibrandtsen, 1993.

In addition, several single-family houses, holiday homes, commercial and industrial buildings as well as written works.

# FLOOR PLAN



Shrubbery area (various) 100 sq' of lot 190 sq'  
 Variegated 2500 calyx (see name)  
 for others see 10 000 calyx  
 Woodland 800 calyx









# Preface

For more than 60 years, the house designed in 1955 by the Danish architect Erik Christian Sørensen for himself and his family has been a great source of inspiration for generations of architects – and not without reason.

The iconic house is not merely a strong personal expression of a characteristically modernistic view of architecture; it also impresses through a meticulously tight and modular construction, with a flexible openness, a sublime interaction with the garden and an elegant use of wood as the dominant building material.

When the house was listed in 2005, it was described as a house that “occupies an important place among post-war Danish detached homes as an architecturally singularly successful piece of experimental and pioneering work”.

In 2019, Realdania By & Byg bought the house and initiated a painstaking and gentle restoration to preserve the unique architectural and heritage values for future generations.

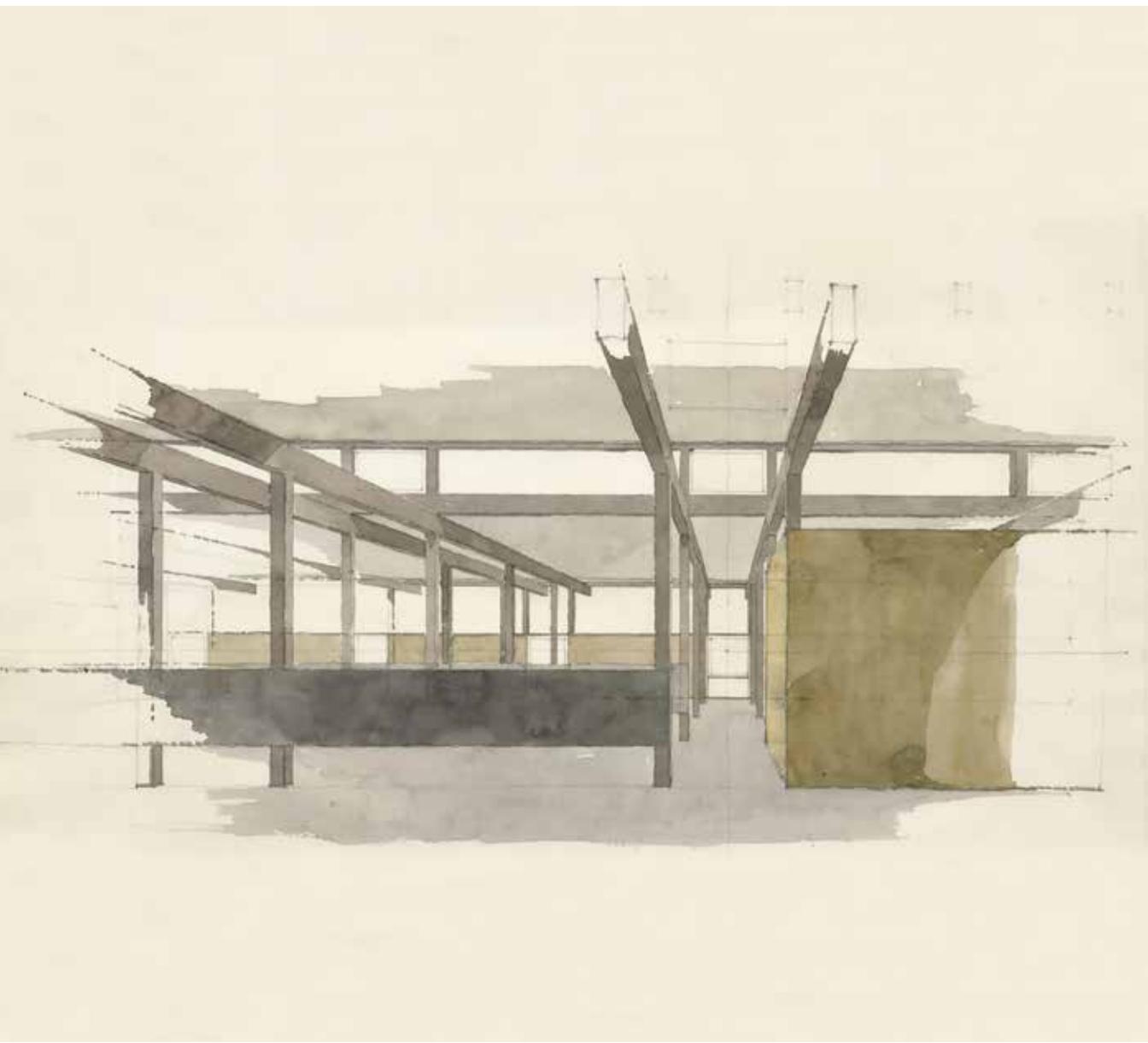
Erik Christian Sørensen lived in the house with the adjacent drawing office until 1969. As a professor at the Royal Danish Academy School of Architecture for more than 30 years, and with distinctive buildings such as the Viking Ship Hall in Roskilde and his own house on Smutvej in Charlottenlund, he made a clear mark on Danish architectural history.

The modular construction of the house and its glazed areas form spacious, fluid passages, and yet separate areas are clearly defined and have distinct functions. The domestic warmth and the Nordic tones from the untreated pine walls are elegantly in line with the international trends in architecture at that time.

Erik Christian Sørensen’s house is a sublime encounter between Danish building culture and the international impulses – particularly from Japan and the US – which inspired Danish architects in the early 1950s, and as Erik Christian Sørensen himself said about the house, “it’s a radical interpretation of the Danish half-timbered house”.

The house forms part of Realdania By & Byg’s portfolio of approx. 60 properties of historic interest, including several architects’ own houses. The portfolio showcases Danish architectural heritage over 500 years, and it helps promote this living building culture.

Realdania By & Byg  
April 2021



# Erik Christian Sørensen's own house

By architect and professor  
Christoffer Harlang

*Think about structure before walls and floorplan  
concentrate on transitions and fillers  
provoke all technology and all surfaces  
allow tactility its rightful place  
know your terms  
refine the method*

These are the words of the architect Professor Erik Christian Sørensen in his 2003 book *Poetics for architecture (Poetik til Bygningskunst)*, in which he writes down some of his insights into buildings.

You will probably have to read what Erik Christian Sørensen writes several times, but there are rewards for those seeking insight into the thoughts of one of Denmark's best architects, and it is a good description of the ideas behind the house he built for his family and as his drawing office almost half a century before, in 1954–55, at Smutvej 14 in Ordrup, north of Copenhagen.

The house on Smutvej, with its flat roofs over the lightweight facades, large chimney and slender walls has been built with moderation – as a rigorous structure with a meticulous materiality and a carefully designed construction of pillars, timber, glass and brickwork.

In other words a very uncomplicated, but rich, house in simple materials, combined to form a harmonious whole of immediate beauty.

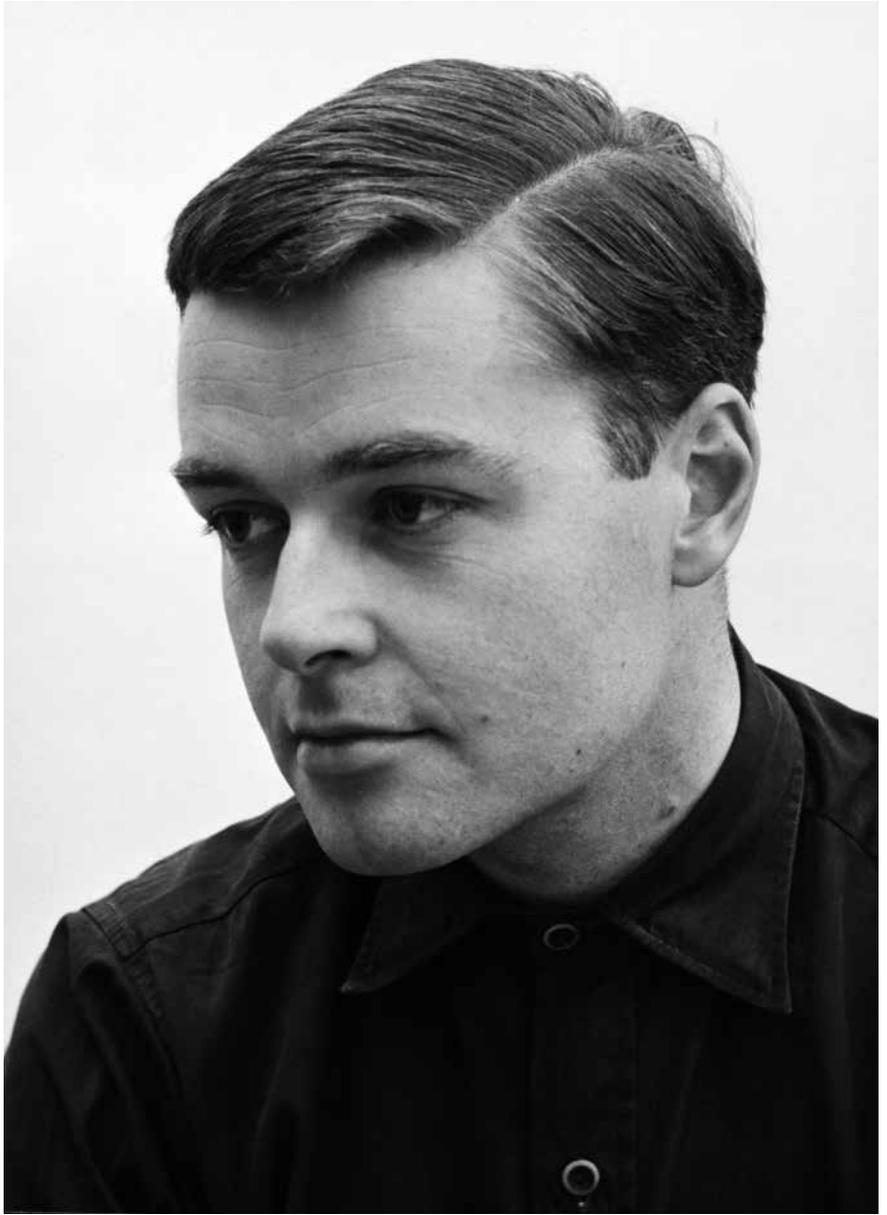
Structural plan by Erik Christian Sørensen. The drawing reflects the structural principles which also characterise the house on Smutvej.



It is a very modern house; it is a child of its time, but it is very much based on timeless insights and effects.

The impression made by the house is very different from encounters with other modern contemporary timber houses. This is primarily evidenced by the fine proportionality in all the components and spaces of the house; secondly there is the refined way the house is laid out with the close spatial cohesion between the house and the garden making it exceptional, and finally there is the sophisticated way in which we enter the house through a portal.

Historical photograph of the drawing office wing of the house with Erik Christian Sørensen's bright office.



Portrait of architect  
Erik Christian Sørensen,  
probably from the early  
1950s.



On the left-hand side of the south facade, the rockery and hedge divide the garden area and they are a continuation of the internal lines and division of the house.



# The house and garden

The house is discretely withdrawn on a plateau, slightly raised above the sloping road. From the road, the house behind the tall hedge is not very visible, however you can sense its presence as a low distinct composition of flat roofs with eaves, low walls and glazed areas and with a tall chimney.

Erik Christian Sørensen's own description of the house dated 12 October 1955 states that: "The ground has been levelled by excavating and refilling, so that a courtyard and two garden rooms are situated at a level 20 cm below the floor level of the single-floor house. The old terrain and residual soil form a plateau crested by a rock embankment half a metre above the original level."

The house has been raised above the road and you approach it along the gently rising cul-de-sac from Smutvej leading in through the house and into the courtyard. The courtyard is surfaced with pearl gravel, and it constitutes a formal, but also very friendly arrival space, which frameworks events and is clearly defined by the two low wings of the house, greenery and the rockeries.

## The spaces of the house and garden

The structure of the house consists of the two low wings of dark-brown wood formed by a number of modules over a T-shaped floor plan that creates a varied and divided passage of space both inside the house and outside in the garden. The garden space is just as important as the space inside the house, and the divisions of the garden into three very different spaces to the west, the south-west and south have been created with a design and with proportions and characteristics that reflect the link to the interior of the house.

Arrival at the house via the small cul-de-sac from Smutvej and into the pearl-graveled courtyard.





The passage of the low rockeries, the different levels of the garden and the light timber structure combined with the greenery proffer a series of very different and atmospheric garden spaces.

Erik Christian Sørensen's own plan of the garden dated 16 April 1958, i.e. three years after he moved in, shows the attention and thought paid to the nature, scope and location of the plants and vegetation, and how the house, the existing vegetation and the new plants have been coordinated.

The handwriting on the plan of the garden is unusually neat, perhaps so that the family gardener, Lunau from the Vilvorde Nursery could read it, and it shows a plum tree and laburnum towards the road; a large pine tree, *Pinnus Panderosa* that still stands mightily in the courtyard today; three apple trees in the garden space to the west, and nine thujas in a curve in the pergola to the

Historical photograph of the courtyard when the house was originally built. The house is almost unchanged, and only the plants reveal the passing of time.



There is access to the house and the drawing office from the courtyard. The gateway and garage are also an integrated part of the house.

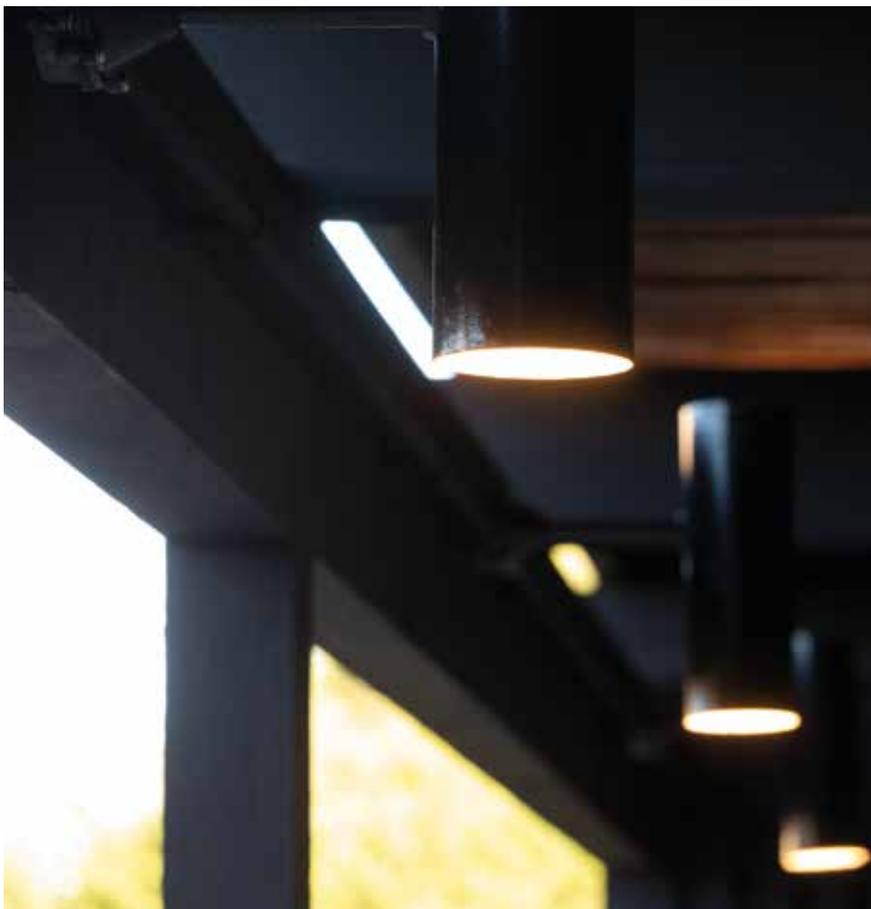
south-west to screen off the road. Until a few years ago, a distinctive birch tree stood on the lawn outside the sitting room, giving character and shade to the south-facing garden space.

### **House and garden as a spatial whole**

The house is not, as is otherwise often seen in many modern houses, intended as an architectural object standing on a surface with a more or less successful cohesion between the two. On the contrary, the architecture at Smutvej has been developed in a close reciprocity between house and garden. The house and garden have been designed as a spatial whole, entailing a series of preparatory deliberations for the way in which both elements are to be developed, and interconnect.



The cylindrical lamps were designed by Erik Christian Sørensen. They form a horizontal link between the garage through the gateway and entrance hall and out of the back door to the area in front of the kitchen.



The house thus becomes part of a culture with which Erik Christian Sørensen had a close relationship throughout his life; a culture the effects of which are demonstrated convincingly in English landscaping and architecture. In the elegant English houses by architects such as Edwin Lutyens and Baillie Scott – both of whom Erik Christian Sørensen knew well and used as references in his teaching at the Royal Danish Academy School of Architecture – architecture starts not at the front door or at the footings, but at the garden wall and the garden space, and the elements of architecture were conceived, constructed and experienced inseparably from the house's interior, like two sides of the same coin.

The building was built almost exclusively in wood, with the exception of the garden wall and chimney, both of which are made of yellow bricks.





The living room is the largest room, and the dining room and living room can be merged together through a folding door. The flooring is the original slate tiles.



# Art and architecture

When the house was built, to the south-west Erik Christian Sørensen built a very simple structure as a small pergola with purlins borne on twelve posts, but this is unfortunately no longer there. It was an open structure, derived from and in close harmony with the main structure of the house, and together with the house it described how a structure formed by posts, purlins and battens can incorporate different possibilities to form space and shelter. The pergola never really had an actual function; it was an uninhabited room in the garden and as the years went by it became overgrown and ultimately vanished.

One of the most important elements in the house is the yellow brick wall angled perpendicularly to the house to close off the road and lead into the house and on into the courtyard. This is where you arrive, and this is where you are received. According to Erik Christian Sørensen's own description of the building of the house, the garden wall should have been whitewashed, but it never was; it remained in bare yellow wall, beautifully patinated.

On the inside of the wall facing the garden, Erik Christian Sørensen shaped a relief in brick, which adds a diffuse, almost ruinous character to the strict texture of the wall that today has become very effectively weathered.

There are no drawings of the relief on the garden wall. Erik Christian Sørensen apparently agreed on the construction with the bricklayer on-site while the house was under construction and the dense composition of the relief corresponds nicely with the way the wall stretches into the centre of the house to create an opening to a fireplace on the floor.

The relief in the garden wall was created by Erik Christian Sørensen.



### **The chimney – an essential component of the composition of the house**

Just as Erik Christian Sørensen was constantly absorbed in combining landscaping and architecture, he was also fascinated by the interface between art and architecture, and he has said that as a young man he wanted to be a sculptor. He was a close friend of the sculptor Søren Georg Jensen, for whom he designed a house with studio, and throughout his life, Erik Christian Sørensen was a great admirer of the art of Gerhard Henning and Aristide Maillol.

In one of his last buildings, the Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre in England, built in 1992, he created a huge relief in the facade brickwork towards the road. This motif is more expressive and dramatic than the relief on Smutvej, with jagged brick surfaces and in-laid surfaces with crystals.

The chimney pipe on his own house on Smutvej renders compositional authority, and its breadth is crucial for the whole experience of the house. It was originally a bare wall, but later black flashing was added to the upper part, and for many years, at Erik Christian Sørensen's request, it was tarred to retain the black colouring.

The windows were designed with a narrow parapet panel which can be opened to provide ventilation. The narrow window under the panel lightens the expression.

The chimney pipe gives the house elegance and adds to the overall experience of the house.





The main constructive principle of the house is a three-dimensional purlin system of black-painted pine.

# Construction and design

The house's wing towards the road is 16.8 x 6.7 m and is thus approx. 112 m<sup>2</sup>. The wing is constructed over a main module of 2.1 x 3.35 m and consists of a total of eight modules of 2.1 m for the longest side and two modules of 3.35 m in width.

The construction comprises timber pillars, purlins and rafters, divided by board-covered walls with visible timber construction. This fine carpentry and joinery are the skilful work of master joiner Svendsen from Ordrup based on very few plans. Svendsen also delivered the drawing boards and trestles for the drawing office as well as all other wood furnishings including the cupboards, wardrobes and kitchen cabinets Erik Christian Sørensen designed for the house.

The outer walls of the house between the pillars comprise windows and half-timbered-clad boards with wooden strips, except for the two eternit gables. The windows were originally two-layer Polyglass mounted with glass rails and sealed with aluminium putty. In the south facade, in addition to a sliding door, there is also glazing around a flap that opens to reveal the heating installations. The flap has a wooden frame with eternit on both sides. The inside doors are made of laminated boards.

## **Graduated influx of light**

The living room was originally one large room connecting to the dining room, but it was divided into two early on by a partition wall with folding doors designed like the other walls in the house, with vertical pine-board cladding.



The most distinctive room in the house is the living room with a square floorplan 6.7 m across and three bays measuring 2.1 m along the length of the house and grey slate flooring with 30 x 30 cm tiles and bricked fireplace on the floor. The three large windows to the south light up the room and bind it with the garden outside.

The window is divided in two, and one part has a sliding door down to the floor with closed areas with ventilation flaps near the ceiling, while the second part has a horizontal parapet free of the floor with built-in heating and glass panel towards the ceiling. The light is graduated by the influx from the horizontal surfaces, and this also highlights the property of the wood construction to be very subtly filled out or trans-illuminated as a brittle, fragile structure.

Erik Christian Sørensen made a number of changes while he lived in the house. He was intent on graduating the light, which in certain places in the house was perceived as sharp and dazzling, and in around 1960 he built a

Photograph from around 1960 of the living room with the free-standing Poul Kjærholm sofas. The bookcase on the wall at the back and the lamp at the side of the fireplace are original from when the house was built.



Photographs from the late 1950s of daughter Anne in the nursery, which at that time had a basin, and wife Karin Tholstrup in the kitchen.



number of skylights in the roof to reduce the dazzle. Some were fitted with wooden grills to reduce the light influx.

### **A beautiful and effective design**

The slender black beams against the white ceiling form an elegant rhythm and they rest on the longitudinal purlin carried by two slim pillars. One of these pillars is in the gable, and like the other pillars in the house it is black; the second stands free, two-thirds into the room.

The constructional marking of the beams, purlin and pillars in two perpendicular directions that meet in a cross is unusual and highly characteristic of the house and of Erik Christian Sørensen's skill at exploiting the structure as an element in forming the room. It provides a singular spatial aspect very different from what is usually seen in the architecture of the time with its propensity to split up the space with constructive divisions in only one direction.

Erik Christian Sørensen's cross-design is much more spatially complex and effective, and he repeats it later in several of his buildings, including the Viking Ship Hall in Roskilde, built in 1969, where the large concrete structures along and across the building give two-fold comparable effects.

In spaces formed by this principle, there is a sense that the room gathers itself around the user, and the structure renders an entirely different volume to the experience of the space – also in very modestly sized spaces. The space is not experienced as sharply sectioned into two, but rather as genuinely spatial, as it were, in all three dimensions. On Smutvej, this design provides an unusually attractive frame for the furnishing in the living room by the fireplace. This characteristic solution is also seen in the drawing office and the bedroom to the west, where the three-part orthogonality makes for a very distinctive room.

The Viking Ship Hall in  
Roskilde was designed by  
Erik Christian Sørensen in 1969.

### **Kitchen in the American style**

Erik Christian Sørensen designed a small low table for the living room with a frame made of welded iron tubing and with a rectangular black two-part slate tabletop. He was assisted by a very young furniture designer called Poul Kjærholm to design a sofa that was to hang on the wall.

The sofa was supported by a flat steel bracket and it had leather cushions with buttons. It was later put into production as PK 26 by manufacturer Kold Christensen, but Erik Christian Sørensen was not satisfied with it in the room; he felt that its horizontal form conflicted with the vertical rhythm of the walls set by the black pillars. Therefore Kjærholm's sofa was taken down and instead installed at Hotel Østerport, which Erik Christian Sørensen built in 1956. To replace it Erik Christian Sørensen commissioned Poul Kjærholm to design a free-standing sofa for the room, and the result has since become one of Kjærholm's most well-known pieces of furniture: PK 31/3.

The kitchen at Smutvej was modest in the American style, with horizontal windows forming a transition to the more private section of the house with bathroom, nurseries, bedrooms and built-in wardrobes, cork floors and lightweight wooden walls.

Drawing office wing at Smutvej  
with Erik Christian Sørensen's  
office. Below the windows is  
a rail so that the window can  
slide to the side for access.







Historical photograph of the south facade of the house. Note the original wall-hung sofa along the rear wall of the living room. The sofa was later moved to Hotel Østerport, which Erik Christian Sørensen designed in 1956.



# The main house and the drawing office

The entrance hall of the house is a separate space with guest toilet and wardrobe, and as an independent narrow wing perpendicular to the width of the house, the entrance hall separates the residence from the drawing office.

The front door of the house is more heavily dimensioned than the more delicate elements of the drawing office, and this makes for an architectural demarcation of the difference between the main house and the adjacent, more delicate drawing office, which belongs more to the garden. The wing with the entrance hall and drawing office is only 4.2 m deep and the facade measures slightly less than the wing, namely 2 m, and is subdivided into a 1 m measurement. The drawing office is not large, and its space is divided into two.

Erik Christian Sørensen's light office was originally at the back towards the gable with a closed end wall and windows to the garden and the courtyard. He ran his architect firm from here from 1955 to 1963, usually with two to three employees sitting in one room with longitudinal purlins and a pillar situated in the centre of the room.

## Thoughts about expanding the firm

In 1956-63 architects such as Søren Koch, Ole Dreyer, Erik Korshagen, Knud Holscher and Nils Fagerholt sat here. Assignments included houses, office buildings for Landmandsbanken on Lersø Parkallé and the pharmaceuticals company Lundbeck in Valby, as well as Hotel Østerport. The latter was designed by Knud Holscher, and among the very graceful houses created in this

There is direct access from the nursery to the garden in the west gable end of the house. Shutters can be closed on the door to shade from the sunlight.



Drawing office wing with Erik Christian Sørensen's office to the rear. The flooring is grey rubber in the same style as the original.

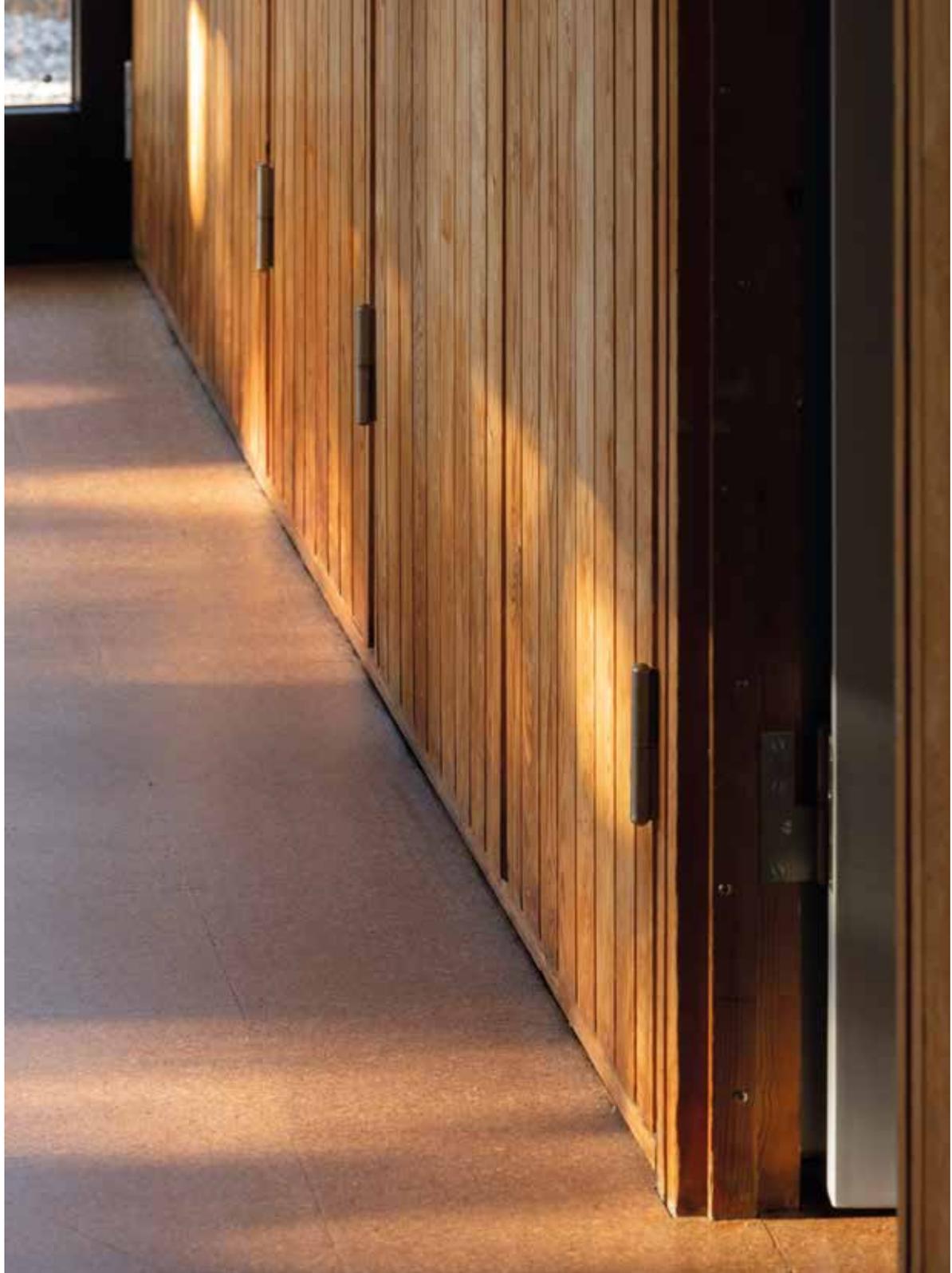
period was a house in Cambridge in England for the Kennard family, which Nils Fagerholt designed in 1959.

The firm grew, Erik Christian Sørensen purchased the neighbouring plot with a view to expanding the firm, and he sketched plans to extend the structure of the house. His plans for the extension continued the language from the original house and the abandoned sketches show many different variations of delicate wooden structures and brickwork divides with brittle flat roofs.

However, in 1964 Erik Christian Sørensen and his architect firm moved out of the house, and the drawing office was incorporated as part of the dwelling where his ex-wife, the artist Karin Tholstrup and the children remained. The office in the gable room became a transition to the bedroom and the window towards the garden was replaced by a closed wall with vertical wood cladding in style with the other cladding. Until 1994, the drawing office functioned as Karin Tholstrup's studio, and in order to improve the connection between the studio and the garden, in the 1980s normal standard door with a glass panel was installed.

The property in figures:  
Plot area 1,212 m<sup>2</sup>.  
Floor area of the house 139 m<sup>2</sup>.  
Floor area of the office 49 m<sup>2</sup>.





# Trends and inspiration

There was a great deal of interest in the house on Smutvej when it was completed in autumn 1955, and it was immediately considered as perhaps the most refined interpretation of current international trends in architecture, which at that time had just reached Denmark from the US and would influence the design of many houses in the years to follow.

Today, the house is considered an eminent representative of the modern house from late 20th century Denmark, and it remains a great inspiration for architects from Denmark and abroad.

There are several reasons why the house on Smutvej has been graced with this very prominent position in Danish architectural history.

Firstly, the house was one of the very first houses in Denmark to be built in the new architectural language that would later influence so many buildings throughout the world.

Secondly, Erik Christian Sørensen's interpretation of the new architecture was more complex in its spatial composition than contemporary and later buildings. Thirdly, the proportions of rooms and details are extremely elegantly designed.

Moreover, the simple lines and materials of the house had a resonance in the Danish half-timbered house that Erik Christian Sørensen himself mentioned, which is characterised by rhythm and constructive clarity.

Atmospheric picture from the nursery. The bedrooms have cork-tile flooring. The nursery and parents' bedroom are separated by a closet wall.



### **Inspired by Swedish architects**

Erik Christian Sørensen found inspiration for his house in several places. Like many of his peers and older colleagues during the German occupation of Denmark, he lived in Sweden as a young man, where he worked at an architects' office in Stockholm.

During this period, he learned a lot about Swedish culture and architecture, which was very strong at that time, and Gunnar Asplund, Svend Markelius and Sigurd Lewerentz were the leading modern architects. The collaboration between Lewerentz and Asplund on landscaping the Skogskyrkogården cemetery in Stockholm particularly inspired Erik Christian Sørensen. The graceful buildings designed by Asplund and Lewerentz were sensitively developed, with reciprocity between the garden and landscape levels, while their charming characteristics were unmistakably Gustavian. They were very refined and elegant in their proportions and details, and always rich in the tactile effects of the materials.

The nursery stretches over three modules – one with a desk panel for study.



The kitchen and dining room can be open plan or separated by the grey sliding doors. The kitchen is almost original.

For the young Danish architects living in Stockholm at this time, Danish simplicity was lifted by Swedish lyricism. In Stockholm, a Japanese tea-house at the Etnografiska Museum also attracted attention, and many years later, in 1999, Erik Christian Sørensen wrote an essay on his time in Stockholm, and what it meant to him.

A small pavilion by the banks of what he calls “one of Stockholm’s many waterways” was included as an illustration for the article because, “We were very interested in the Swedish love of juxtaposition in size. No matter whether it is Asplund’s delicate eaves set on the large flat facades of the Skogskyrkogården chapel, or an echo of the Gustavian style in our contemporary carpentry and joinery. The small pavilion stands directly out to the vast open water. We could also do this in Denmark before the Art Nouveau period (skønvirkeperioden) awoke the peasant in us.”

## On forming a space

In a conversation with the author Kim Dirckinck-Holmfeld in 1993 Erik Christian Sørensen spoke about his role models: *"....and of course from Mies van der Rohe, whose early rural courtyard houses I've always admired and tried to reprise in my own work. I mean the American tradition of timber houses and something as Danish as the Open Air Museum [Frilandsmuseet]! The half-timbered farmhouses of Zealand or other areas. In these, the simple material and the use of it from place to place obtain a recognisable clarification. In Smutvej, which formed an element in my teaching even before it had been built, I sought out simple effects; cleansed of the superfluous. Essentially I wanted to get back to the fundamentals of architecture: proportion, rhythm, light, texture; perhaps first and foremost a certain lightness and brightness; the things which allow the exterior and interior of the house to merge, and form a single, unified space".*







# Principles of shape and proportion

The German-born architect Mies van der Rohe was influential in the 20th century, and in 1923 he designed a much-talked-about brick country house. The house was never built, but it has since had great importance for the development of the modern house and thus also for the ideas behind the house on Smutvej – not least the long walls that rise sharply from the surface.

Where a house was previously considered as a closed structure with openings or as some other block with which to shape a figure, in this project Mies van der Rohe developed entirely new ideas about the house as a structure with a spatial open composition, which primarily consisted of floors and flat roofs, and vertical wall plates that in a way “slid over” one another to form a fluid, indeterminate space.

The planes of the house were flexible for conversions and changes, and like the facades they were no longer symmetrical, and because the houses were supported by pillars and vertical wall plates, the facades no longer had to be supporting. Mies van der Rohe and others like him worked with growth, flexibility and transparency. The idea was not only inspired by the new abstract-art compositions that could slide almost imperceptibly over each other; it was also aided by technological developments that made possible very large glass panels.

Mies van der Rohe’s ideals from the country house have since been developed in different directions and interpretations, and his ideas have had

The house’s composition of flat roofs with eaves, low walls and glazed areas creates an elegant whole, inspired by Japanese architecture and style.

huge significance for modern architecture, including in Denmark, where his emphasis on both the structure detail and texture is still a reference.

### **Inspiration from America**

In the years after the Second World War, a number of the houses built on the east and west coasts of America can be seen as continuations and interpretations of Mies van der Rohe's ideas. With inspiration from traditional Japanese architecture, among others architects Walter Gropius, Charles & Ray Eames and Marcel Breuer designed elegant and refined buildings, in which open plans with slender structures and fine proportions dissolved the divide between the rooms, and in which glass from floor to ceiling brought together outdoor and indoor spaces.

These buildings attracted a lot of attention throughout the world, and the majority of Danish architects were much inspired by them. The kitchen had modest space, but a dominant position in these modern houses, that were usually single level with flat roofs, often supported by pillars painted black and with a large living room with a fireplace and glass panels, a pergola and a carport for the important new member of the family: the car. They were new and very characterful houses with a lot of attention to the design of the building and to elegant joints between the building components and fine material effects, often situated in scenic natural surroundings or the new suburbs around major cities.

### **Danish interpretation of the new trends**

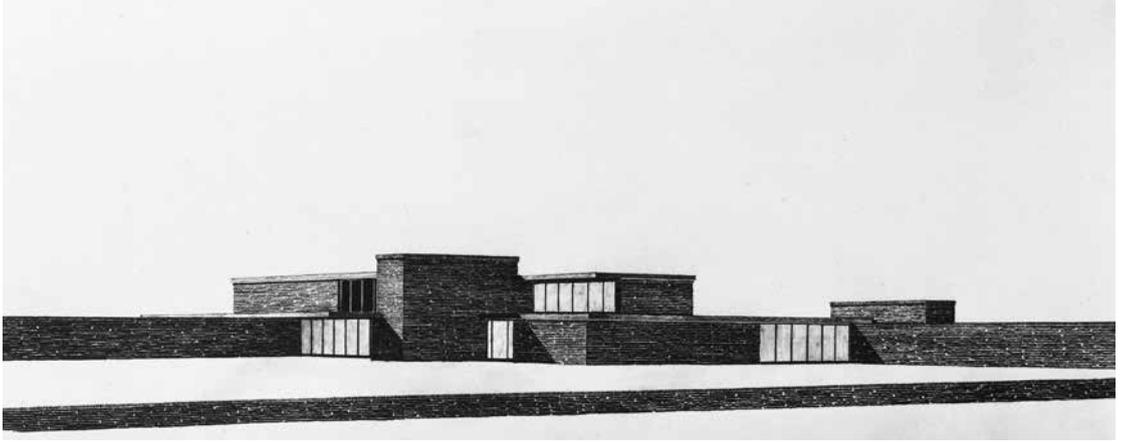
Jørn Utzon was one of the first to take inspiration from the new American architecture in the house he built in 1952 for himself and his family at Hellebæk in North Zealand. The house is low with a flat roof, and a longitudinal wall shelters the open terraced floorplan with a fireplace and kitchen in a brick core. In 1958, the architect Halldor Gunnløgsson also built a house in Rungsted for himself inspired by these new ideas, and nearby the architects Hanne and Poul Kjærholm built their house in 1963.

Some sources of inspiration for modernist Danish architects:

Country house in Backstein by architect Mies van der Rohe, 1923.

Architect Halldor Gunnløgsson's private residence at Rungsted Kyst, 1958.

Skogskyrkogården cemetery and crematorium, Monument Hall by the architect Gunnar Asplund, 1935-40.





# America and Denmark

Impressions of post-war America had such a great significance for Danish architecture in the 1950s and 1960s because personal contacts were established immediately after the war between the blossoming American architect community and the new generation of young talents in Danish architecture.

Jørn Utzon and Erik Christian Sørensen was among those who in 1948-49 visited the US and returned home with inspirational impressions of the modern new architecture. The go-between was architect Kay Fisker, who from his position as one of the absolute leading architects and as a professor at the Royal Danish Academy School of Architecture had close personal ties to the strong new architect communities being established on the American east and west coasts.

## Inspiration from Bauhaus

As refugees from Nazi Germany, Mies van der Rohe, Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius established themselves on the coast around Boston in the 1930s, and on the basis of their shared past as teachers in Bauhaus, Germany, they formed these new and very inspirational learning environments at architect schools and at their architecture firms.

With influences from the new technical possibilities, they developed and cultivated the modern architectural style and their new buildings were both lighter and more advanced than ever before.

On Erik Christian Sørensen's house, the rafters on the south side led out through the facade to form an eave to shade from the sun.



### **Principles of growth and variation**

The solidly walled block of a house was abandoned, as was the white cubism of functionalism, and in their place came houses with delicate structures inspired by principles of growth and variation through addition. More with less, light and brittle.

The informal, but meticulously designed small timber houses by Marcel Breuer, Richard Neutra and Raphael Soriano made a particular impression, and their interpretations of the good – and thoroughly modern – life in the open living rooms with fireplaces, butterfly chairs and carports, all preferably with whitewashed tiles and exposed black-painted timber structures, was favoured by young Danish architects, who revitalised the impressions in their Danish interpretations.

At the back door in front of the kitchen and bathroom, the structure of the house leads through the facade without eaves.



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Christoffer Harlang is a Danish architect, designer, author and professor at the Royal Danish Academy School of Architecture. He left the Academy in 1983 after having studied with Erik Christian Sørensen. In the period 2004-2007 he was the chairman of the board of the Danish Arts Foundation and from 2007, chairman of the Historic Building Council under the Danish Ministry of Culture. In 2008, he was appointed as a professor of cultural heritage, transformation and restoration at the Royal Danish Academy School of Architecture.

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Erik Christian Sørensen's own house

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